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ABSTRACT

A program for adult learners with special needs has been conducted in Salem County, New Jersey, for five years. The program was created under a Public Law 94-482 grant and since has been supported by a Department of Human Services grant, by various services clubs, and by the local board for vocational education. The program has three phases. In phase one, a two-segment continuing education option is offered in which participants are provided with individual and small group counseling, vocational assessment, and prevocational training. The second phase of the program involves the participation of clients in selected vocational skill training courses along with relevant support services. The third phase of the program involves adult learners with special needs who participate in fulltime vocational-technical training programs. The key element of this option is the identification of skills in which the adult not only has an interest, but also the reasonable chance to acquire those skills necessary for employment. Job counseling and job placement support services are also provided. The program has been serving about 35-50 persons at a time, with a 40 percent job placement rate. Its success has been enhanced by its emphasis on the Sheppard counseling concept to support participants, by an assessment system, and by an employment-assistance program. Problems in the program have stemmed from a changing clientele that is increasingly severely mentally handicapped, lack of transportation for students, and overcoming the identification, location, and motivation problems of the participants. (This report includes a syllabus of the course and information on instructional and assessment materials used.) (KC)

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LEARNING AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

FOR ADULT LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Presented at the 78th Annual Convention

of the

American Vocational Association

December 1, 1984

By: William H. Adams, Ed.D.

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Preface

In Salem County, New Jersey, a successful program has been conducted for five (5) years for adult learners with special needs. This program was developed initially under a P.L. 94-482 grant and was subsequently supported by a Department of Human Services grant and by various service clubs such as, the Lions and Elks. The program has also received local financial support from the Salem County Board for Vocational Education.

The program is three-phase. In phase one, a two-segment continuing education option is offered in which participants are provided with individual and small group counseling, vocational assessment

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and pre-vocational training. The second phase of this program involves the participation of clients in selected vocational skill training courses along with relevant support services. The third phase of the program involves adult learners with special needs who participate in full-time vocational technical training programs. The key element of this particular option involves the identification of those skills for which the adult not only has interest, but also the reasonable chance to acquire those skills necessary for employment. Job counseling and job placement support services are also provided.

Key problems include ways to overcome the identification, location and motivation of the participants. Techniques that will be described include the enhancement of self-concept of the participants, a Sheppard counseling concept which is used to support participants while in the vocational program, an assessment system used for employment counseling and finally, the employment assistance program. Specific developmental and operational program activities are also presented.

Overview of Need

Unfortunately, adult learners with special needs often, "fall through the cracks" in that there is no continuum or coordination of services either at the federal, state, or local level to provide for basic and vocational educational opportunities

or services for these persons. Thus, frequently, adult learners with handicaps or special learning needs are forced to rely upon the services that are available through the primary agency that may service their handicap or special need. While these agencies or commissions do a commendable job, they have limited resources and frequently are unable to address the vocational skill and counseling needed by adults with handicaps in order for them to be employable.

Frequently for those adults who have a learning disability, but not a specific identifiable handicap such as blindness, being hearing impaired, physically handicapped or mentally handicapped, there are no educational alternatives. Project H.O.P.E., which is a program entitled, Handicapped Orientation Program for Employment, and is offered by the Salem County Vocational Technical Schools, provides such an option.

History of the Program

Based on a need that was identified through local service clubs, the program was started at the Salem County Vocational Technical Schools for adults with learning disabilities in September of 1978. The program was initially started through a grant that was obtained under a Public Law 94-482 RFP proposal through the New Jersey Department of Education, Division of Vocational Education. In the original program, adult learners were counseled

based upon records that were compiled by agencies with whom they had previously or currently were associated. Students were cycled through various special vocational programs where specific skills were targeted based upon their interest, motivation and ability. Skill programs included instruction for building trades helpers, health aides, custodians, receptionist, small engine repair, sewing and fast food preparation. Career ladders were established so that those students who progressed beyond the initial courses were able to enter regular vocational programs. Participation in regular vocational programs was supported through a Sheppard counseling concept. A counselor was specifically assigned to work with students and to assist in solving problems which would preclude the adult student from moving through the program and to reaching his/her employment goals.

Annual enrollment in this program ranged from between 35 and 50 students, with approximately 40 percent of the completers becoming employed. After the first two years of the program, the local Board of Education assumed responsibility for its continuance. Assistance was also received from various service clubs who had a particular interest in assisting handicapped persons. For example, a local Lions Club helped sponsor transportation, while an Elks Club provided support for physically handicapped persons in need of wheelchairs and/or braces.

In 1983 under a New Jersey Department of Human Services grant,

the program was modified. The program was modified primarily because the population that was being served was changing from a deaf/blind, physically handicapped population to a more mentally handicapped population. It was also felt that more persons could be better served by moving away from the more rigidly structured initial orientation skill programs in favor of a semester of counseling and testing. The revised program was entitled, Handicapped Orientation Program for Employment, (Project H.O.P.E.). In addition to test records that were supplied by various agencies that had previously served the participants, the school initiated testing programs. The tests utilized were:

SAGE Vocational Aptitude Battery
SAGE Vocational Interest Inventory
SAGE Assesment of Work Attitudes
COATS, and
SINGER

Specifically for those persons who were able to take a paper and pencil test, the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) Elementary and Medium Level Forms were utilized. For most persons, the SAGE Vocational Interest Inventory was also administered. This inventory can be administered either in written form, orally or by viewing pictures. The SAGE Cognitive and Conceptual Abilities Test, Vocational Aptitude Battery and Assessment of Work Attitudes were also utilized, where appropriate. This battery was used to identify specific skills and interests.

The COATS and SINGER systems were also utilized, where appropriate.

Students saw films on work attitudes, discussed employment skills and participated in small group sessions designed to assist in developing positive self-concept and motivation. The program consisted of seventeen (17) three-hour sessions. In both the initial and revised program, transportation was provided and no tuition or fees were charged to participants.

Population Served

The population served included the blind, deaf, physically handicapped, mentally handicapped and learning disadvantaged. The highest degree of success in the program was realized by the blind, physically handicapped and deaf persons in that order. The learning disadvantaged for the most part were found to be eligible, under the former employment training program CETA, and more recently, the current JTPA training program, to participate in short and mid-term vocational training programs. These students were also supported with the Sheppard Counseling Concept. As a result, most of these persons after the initial semester of particpation in the previous or more current program were mainstreamed into an employment training program ranging from twelve (12) weeks to fifty-two (52) weeks in length, depending upon interest, skill development potential, need and employment opportunity. Participants who lacked high school diplomas were also provided an opportunity to obtain the same either

through the district's GED Program or Adult High School.

During the period between 1978 and 1981, the program was particularly helpful to blind participants. It was found that the program least served the mentally handicapped. This was especially true for those with limited mental capacities who lived in group homes, institutional settings or who were served through the Association for Retarded Citizens. Although the program proved to be extremely beneficial to these persons as a social outreach program, it was not successful as a vocational training or skill development program leading to unsubsidized employment for these persons.

How and Where to Find Adult Learners with Special Needs

Over the years there have been a steady but small stream of inquiries concerning vocational education opportunities for adult learners in need of special assistance. There did not seem to be a consistent high volume need in any one sector of the county community or in the requests received from any single agency. It was found out, however, through the county ministerium and through the Vocational Rehabilitation Agency that such need existed and that frequently many adults with such needs would simply just give up and remain at home rather than to explore what might be just another "dead end lead."

It was found, therefore, that the typical press releases, or

paid in-print, or electronic media advertisements did not reach this population. Most of the participants were referred via the county ministerium, local service clubs, and agencies that were contacted, such as the Commission for the Blind, the Human Services Council, the Association for Retarded Citizens, etc. While these means were the most effective, this continues to be a problem in that there is no single delivery system to let persons in need know when programs are beginning and that they are available free of charge.

Program Objectives

Although the program has been modified based upon changing student needs, the following objectives continue to form the basis for the highest program priorities:

1. Through counseling and testing, the program will provide assistance toward participation in the work force commensurate with the ability and interest demonstrated by the adult learner.

2. An opportunity will be provided for each adult learner who can succeed to the level of a high school diploma and to acquire the diploma either through testing or participation in the district's adult high school program.

3. An opportunity will be provided for students whose abilities are not sufficient to succeed at the high school level to participate in basic skill training to the limit of their capacities.

The specific student objectives for the program are as follows:

1. Through counseling and testing each student will develop the skills in those identified areas necessary for employment. These skills shall include assistance in how to apply, obtain, and succeed on the job.

2. Through the program, each student will acquire a skill chosen in view of the student's interest, aptitude, and abilities. Skill options will be emphasized based on current information and employment opportunities.

The Program

The current concept behind the program is to provide adult learners with intensive counseling exposure and testing leading to placement in a regular continuing education or full-time vocational or technical course. Participants who succeed to this level are provided with an individualized vocaticnal program (IVP). This IVP is developed from information that is acquired through the testing program and is matched to the skills required for succees in the vocational education course. This component of the program has been computerized through the assistance of the Maryland State Department of Education.

The specific steps that are followed in the program are as follows:

1. Review of medical records and available data.

2. Initial interview and counseling session.

3. Counseling session and administration of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) where applicable.

4. Completion of the TABE test, review of results and counseling.

5. Counseling session and administration of the SAGE Vocational Aptitude Battery, where appropriate.

6. Counseling session and administration of the SAGE Vocational Interest Inventory, where appropriate.

7. Counseling session and administration of the SAGE Assessment of Work Attitudes, where appropriate.

8. Counseling sessions on how and where to look for a job.

9. The application and interview process.

10. Keeping the job.

11. Counseling and assignment to an appropriate vocational program.

12. Enrollment into Sheppard Counseling through the vocational program.

13. Setting up and taking participants to interviews.

14. Employment

Three units on job readiness were planned as part of Project H.O.P.E. These units were originally planned for five sessions to include three major topics. The topics are as follows:

1. How and where to look for a job (2 sessions).

2. The application and interview (2 sessions).

3. Keeping the job (1 session).

The initial program included the following:

A. How and where to look for a job. (6 hrs.)

1. Inventory of personal training and interests

2. Review of job market

a. Use of newspaper "want ads"

b. Employment service

c. Making personal contacts

3. Activity units

a. Workbook - "The Career Planning Workshop" The FDN Corp., Jenkintown, PA 19046

b. "Getting the Job", Richard Lynch, McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1977 Library of Congress #76-21262

c. "Knowing Yourself", Kidwell & Wallace, McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1977 Library of Congress #76-13544

B. The Application and Interview (6 hrs.)

1. Completion of applications and mock interviews. Applications supplied courtesy of DuPont Com., PSE&G, ACME Markets

2. Sound Filmstrip - "Get a Job!", Proctor & Gamble, 1980

3. "Job Placement Guide" - Salem Co. Vo-Tech Schools, 1982

4. "Job Finding Kit", Carroll Press, 1975

C. Keeping a Job (3 hrs)

1. Guest speaker from industry

2. "Growing on the Job", Maurice Wilson, McGraw-Hill, Inc., Library of Congress, #76-13463

From this initial program, the following job readiness unit was developed:

JOB READINESS OUTLINE

I.	Getting the Job	Session
	A. The Resume	1,2

1. Format to be used

2. Length of resume

3. Items to be included

- special training & education
- work experience
- address & telephone number
- physical limitations, if any
- references with current address & telephone number

4. Items to be excluded

- personal opinions, anecdote, prejudices
- irrelevant personal data

B. The Application 3

1. Completing the form

- neatness
- completeness
- remember names, addresses, dates, & telephone numbers
- use ink

C. The Interview 4,5,6

1. Preparation for interview

-dress appropriately
-review personal data
- know your social security number, etc.
-learn something about the company
product or service
- approximate size
-any outstanding features or recent favorable publicity

2. The Interview

-sit up & act interested & alert
-answer questions directly & completely
-keep your answers to the point & short
-ask questions if opportunity is given

Ask about
- work schedules, shifts, salary, hours
- available training programs
- possibilities for advancement

Do not ask about
-lunch schedule & breaks
-sick leave
-lateness policies
-vacations

3. Points to remember

a. Emphasize how you can help the employer, not how the employer can help you

b. Act enthusiastic

c. Be honest

d. Stay on the point, don't wander

II. Work Attitudes on the Job 7,8,9,10

A. Employer Expectations

1. Basic skill level
2. Attention to duties
3. Good attendance & promptness
4. Good reputation from school & previous employers
5. Honesty
6. Ability to follow directions
7. Willingness to work on job at hand without constant supervision
8. Willingness to maintain production schedules
9. Good interaction with fellow workers
10. Good interaction with supervision
11. Initiative on the job

B. Indications of lack of job readiness

1. Constant dependence on others
2. Lack of attention to job
3. Lateness or absence
4. Unwillingness to work unless constantly supervised

5. Lack of initiative

6. Trying to "change the situation"

7. Preoccupation with "time-off"

8. Use of alcohol or narcotics during work day

9. Excuses for failures

10. Horseplay

III. Suggested Activities

A. 30 minute assembly with speaker from industry

B. Preparation of mock applications

C. Prepare official resume. (Final drafts were typed and duplicated by Office and Secretarial Specialties Class. Ten copies and original returned to student for use in job search).

D. Conduct mock interviews - to be video taped and re-played to employer shops (1 per class) to see actual work place and meet employees.

IV. Suggested Reference Materials

A. "Job Placement Guide" - Salem County Vocational Technical Schools, 1982

B. "Job Seeking Helps: - Salem County Vocational Technical Schools, 1983

C. "Facing Facts about Planning Your Career" Prudential, Newark, N.J., 1980

D. "The Career Planning Workshop" EDN Corp., Jenkintown, PA, 1982

Test and Assessment Program

In order to provide the adult learner with an individualized vocational program, a series of tests and/or assessments were administered. While this series of tests is extremely time-consuming, it must be noted that all tests were not given to all participants. In fact for some participants, the testing program was extremely limited due to their handicapping condition or learning disability. The range of tests, however, included the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), the System for Assessment and Group Evaluation (SAGE), COATS and the SINGER Systems.

In order to provide the reader with further information concerning

each of these tests and how they may be obtained, a brief narrative has been prepared describing each.

The "Tests of Adult Basic Education "(TABE) is an achievement test encompassing reading, mathematics, and language usage skills. The test is published on three levels: E (Elementary), M (Medium), and D (Difficult).

The following skill areas are tested in each version:

1. Reading - Vocabulary and Comprehension

2. Mathematics - Computation, concepts and problems

3. Language - Capitalization, punctuation, expression and spelling.

The full battery contains 315 items and requires 2 hours and 51 minutes to administer in addition to instruction time.

Results of the TABE test are presented as a raw score of the number of correct answers. No penalty is exacted for wrong answers. Scores are transferrable, using tables supplied by the publisher, from raw scores for each battery to a grade equivalent score. The publisher of the test is CTB/MCGraw Hill, Monterey, CA.

The System for Assessment and Group Evaluation (SAGE) is a

series of tests to assess vocational interests, cognitive and conceptual interests, cognitive and conceptual abilities, aptitudes and work attitudes of students.

The following tests are included:

VII - The Vocational Interest Inventory

Twelve occupational interest areas of the Guide for Occupational Exploration are represented in this instrument.

C-CAT - The Cognitive and Conceptual Abilities Test

Three scores are provided consisting of reasoning, language and mathematics.

VAB - The Vocational Aptitude Battery

This instrument assesses eleven specific aptitudes including: general, verbal, numerical, spatial, form perception, clerical perception, motor coordination, finger dexterity, manual dexterity, eye-hand-foot coordination, and color discrimination.

AWA - Assessment of Work Attitudes

This vehicle presents real life situations in which the student must evaluate a social situation. Twenty categories of attitude behaviors are sampled. A work readiness index which indicates the student's level of work readiness is the final result.

The full battery contains numerous written and manual sections. The written portions take 1 hour and 45 minutes of test time in addition to 30 minutes of preparation time. The manual portions require approximately 40 minutes of testing time plus 1 hour of preparation time.

The results of SAGE generates scores which reflect the student's relative accomplishments in each area. For the Vocational Interest Inventory (VII), the test results serve as a basis of activities that the student is interested in doing. The Assessment of Work Attitudes (AWA) generates a work readiness index which is a direct measurement of the student's knowledge of employer work attitude expectations.

SAGE is the property of the Pleasantville Educational Supply Corporation (PESCO), 21 Paulding Street, Pleasantville, New York 10570.

C.O.A.T.S. is an acronym for Comprehensive Occupational Assessment and Training System. It is comprised of four (4) subsystems:

1. Job Matching
2. Employability Attitudes
3. Work Samples
4. Living Skills

This is a visual/auditory assessment package that integrates video monitors, audio-visual tapes and research materials that can be administered on an individual or small group basis.

The computer scored Job Matching System is used to analyze jobs, to match students to jobs and to provide an opportunity for individualized awareness of preferences, experiences and capabilities.

The Employability Attitudes Assessment is used to define the range of employability attitudes participants have toward work. It is then used to analyze these attitudes in behavioral categories of the student.

The Work Sample System is used to describe performance requirements of specific job families and to calculate by computer the actual potential success rates across all work samples.

The Living Skills Assessment is used to baseline the ability of an individual to function on a daily basis as he/she comes in contact with problems and decisions in the areas of consumerism, health, government and law, community resources and occupations. This component requires the use of skills in reading, writing, computation, speaking and listening, and problem solving.

The C.O.A.T.S. System in its entirety can be used to help predict vocational potential. This is usually done prior to placement into specific training programs or actual work situations.

This enables students to judge their own level of attitude development as it relates to job seeking, job maintenance, and advancement. The C.O.A.T.S. system is available from Edu-Systems, Inc., 1575 Parkway Avenue, Trenton, New Jersey 08628. Administration time is approximately three (3) hours per component, but components can be administered independently of each other.

The SINGER Vocational Evaluation System is designed to be used as a systematized series of programs (work samples). The system serves as a tool for vocational evaluation and vocational exploration. Specifically, the system is used to present occupational information to an individual in a simulated work situation for the purpose of determining the individual's interest and abilities in various job and occupational areas. A group of from one (1) to five (5) participants can be assessed over a variety of tasks. Participants are evaluated on their performance of each task and to the degree that they liked or disliked performing the task. Data collected can be used to recommend suitable training or job placement.

The SINGER evaluation system available at the Salem County Vocational Technical Schools is comprised of eight (8) work samples. They are as follows:

1. Plumbing and Pipefitting
2. Cooking and Baking
3. Air Conditioning and Refrigeration

4. Electrical Wiring
5. Engine Service
6. Medical Service
7. Needle Trades
8. Masonry

Individually, each work sample requires approximately 2 to 3 hours to complete or about 21 hours for the entire series. All work samples need not be attempted, nor must each be completed once begun.

The SINGER Evaluation System is produced by the Singer Education Division, Career Systems, 80 Commerce Drive, Rochester, New York 14623.

From these tests, the counseling program and Individualized Vocational Plan (IVP) was developed for each participant. Individualized Vocational Plans are developed from a summary of the results of the evaluation instruments used, the present level of adult student's academic performance, the identified strengths and weaknesses, the educational services required, and on specific observations that had been made. Development of the plan also includes the identification of the learning behavior and learning style under which the student could best learn from the specific objectives for the student's program, those areas of the skill record where applicable to the student's

program and the strategies to be utilized to assist the student to a successful completion of the program.

The IVP system has been developed over a three-year period initially under a pilot program to provide non-categorical services to handicapped students in secondary vocational programs. The IVP process was expanded to include adults participating in Project H.O.P.E. Beginning with the 1984-85 school year, the process was computerized. The computer program was developed from materials provided by the Maryland State Department of Education for Individualized Vocational Plans (I.V.P.) that have been transported to some five (5) states. Internally, revisions in the IVP process were developed through the district's Director of Special Needs, Raymond J. Bielicki and Anthony Lombardo, the district's School Psychologist.

Transportation

From the outset of the program, it was found that participants had difficulty receiving services regardless of where they were offered or how they were made available due to the lack of transportation. Salem County is a rural county with little in the way of public transportation available. Since the program for the most part was run during the early evening hours, no existing transportation was available.

As a result initially of assistance provided through a local Lions Club in 1978, a bus route was set up to service adult

participants from several of the participating communities. It was soon found, however, that most of the adult participants required special transportation and even though a transportation network was established throughout the county to pick up and drop off participants at specific locations within each community, transportation remained a problem. Thus, even with this type of assistance, the transportation network was found not to be totally adequate since many of the participants needed door-to-door transportation. Where possible, this was provided.

One key to the success with any program to assist adult learners with handicaps is adequate transportation or means for the persons to get to and from the program. This is also a continuing problem that needs to be addressed once these persons acquire the necessary skills for employment. This aspect of the program is handled through the Sheppard concept. In some cases, adults were assisted in acquiring licenses and special adaptation for vehicles so that they could drive themselves to and from work sites. For others, arrangements had to be made for transportation to and from these work sites. This requires a close work relationship and high degree of cooperation with the prime service agencies.

Program Strengths

Essentially, the program has met an unfulfilled need. Therein lies its greatest strength. The major operational strengths of the program have been:

1. The counseling aspect

2. Testing program

3. Sheppard concept

4. Transportation service

5. Placement and follow-up service

It is noted that while placement and follow-up are considered a strength of the program, that only approximately 40% of the participants have actually been placed. This rate, however, is much higher when the mentally handicapped participants are subtracted out for the total. The employment rate then rises almost 60%.

Program Weaknesses

The following are considered program weaknesses:

1. A lack of public or special agency transportation. Thus, this service had to be provided by the school district. This aspect of the program raised the program cost significantly.

2. A trend in enrollment toward persons with severe mental

disabilities occurred in a program that was designed primarily for persons with the intelligence potential to learn basic vocational skills and to learn how to cope on the job regardless of the learning disability or handicapping limitation. The program as a result served only to meet the social needs of the mentally retarded. This aspect of the program also tended to discourage other handicapped persons who were primarily interested in developing skills for employment.

3. The advertising method utilized to reach the target population must be multi-facet. It is believed that while partially successful, this is still a program weakness.

4. Local, social, governmental agencies, religious organizations and families of participants need to cooperate to a greater degree. The program fostered this to some extent. It was not sufficient enough, however, to raise the employability rate of those who could have been employed with better support assistance from families and/or other agencies.

5. The social adjustment needs of students need to be addressed. This need is especially great for those students who may not be capable of acquiring skills beyond those required to work in a sheltered workshop environment or for basic survival.

Recommendations and Summary

It is recommended for persons desiring to start such a program that they carefully survey the agencies, service organizations and local ministerium not only concerning the need and to assist with the identity of participants, but also in identifying the types of participants, their capabilities, their interests, and ultimate goals. To the extent possible, it is recommended that an early introduction to vocational skills be provided to participants to help stimulate motivation and interest in the program. It is critical that while a wide array of testing and assessment instruments be available and used, that they be carefully interdispersed into the program in such a way as not to discourage initial or early participation. If available and if skills have been identified in vocational programs, the development of an IVP (Individual Vocational Plan) is essential as is the Shepparding concept to provide special assistance to participants while they are in basic skills or vocational training programs.

Support for this type of program has been made available by the Department of Human Services, the Department of Education through P.L. 94-482, under the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (C.E.T.A.) and the Job Training Partnership Act Programs. (J.T.P.A.) Through J.T.P.A., funds may be available to replicate this type of program and under the new enacted Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984, it is believed that funds would also be available for this type of population.